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THE SCULPTOR'S GARDEN

Often when I walk in my garden I wonder why artists in their work do not make richer use of treasures such as these I see. If Henri Fabre were here, "the insects' Homer," what an Odyssey he would write of that turtle's stubborn wanderings round and round the fountain, in an undying hope to break away from the thirty feet of string by which his master, the sculptor, has bound him to a stake! Today there was an incredibly fierce assault and capture of our martin-house by the neighbors' yellow-jackets. What an Iliad Fabre would have made of that! All day, poignant drama is staged here, with ruby-throats and gold-finches, wart-backed toads and bright-tongued snakes as actors; science and literature have faithfully reported such things. But what I am wondering about and waiting for is the modern epic of flower-growth, as it should be told in our graphic arts today.

Certainly our painters have shown us gardens and figures in gardens, marvels of color and shimmering light. As for the flowers themselves, their personal beauty as separate creatures was set forth by the early Dutch painters, their rich solidity of rainbow hue has been interpreted by Monet and Monticelli, their exquisite evanescence has been captured by Maria Dewing, Wilton Lockwood and others. Sometimes a mural painter or his assistant makes a decorative border from plant-forms, newly

arranged; while in those minor arts which are the poor relations of painting, there is constant use (and abuse) of flowers, since in every tea-house throughout the land we shall find on chair-backs and tea-trays and candlesticks, flowers painted in the "Biedermeyer style" or the "Victorian style," with more or less skill and sense of design.

So much for painting, both art and handicraft; but what of sculpture? What has the sculptor found in the garden of today, to take the place of the Egyptian lotus, the Greek anthemion, the Renaissance swags and borders, the French garlands and cartouches? It cannot be possible that decorative vegetation ceased on earth with Louis Seize, or that Grinling Gibbons, Chippendale and the brothers Adam left us nothing whatever to do or to undo.

Now I am very far from agreeing with my gloomy Futurist friend that the love of the classic is the root of all evil. I find that his rhyme,

"The Egg and Dart
Brought Death to Art"

has as little truth as poetry in it. But when we consider these three facts, first, that the magic of light and shade is no less today than it was in Pericles' time, and next, that the number and variety of plant-forms suited for interpretation in sculpture is greater now than ever before, and last, that an imaginative conventionalization in lieu of puerile copying is a principle insistently brought before the world of art at the present time, we may well ask why it is that the modern sculptor does not show his hand in rendering today's plant-growth in today's ornament, instead of forever harking back to past inventions. The truest reverence for the Greek spirit is not that which copies Greek forms. Imitation may be the sincerest flattery, but it is not the deepest appreciation; and I hold that our lack of excellent originality in sculptured ornament proceeds from a lack of appreciation of that which underlies classic art, rather than from too much reverence for classic forms. We have failed to note that a certain firsthandedness contributes richly to the vigor of classic ornament.

If we go now into the garden and take the smallest flower there, say the gypsophila paniculata, with flowerets so tiny that it has been nicknamed baby's breath.

we shall find in each miniature blossom a monumental foursquare structure, giving every hint needed for imagining the boldest of sculptured rosettes. Choose on the other hand that majestic samurai among flowers, the Japanese iris, often ten inches from wing-tip to wing-tip; its lordly outline and exquisite undulations of form offer you miracles for modeling. German ivy is as strong of growth and clean of contour as any Greek ivy ever carved on altars of Penetelikon, while the broad silver leaf of certain ordinary poppy plants suggests a finer acanthus than any found in the Forum. There are roots in this garden that beat flying buttresses in their spring; there are stems as firmly channeled as cathedral columns. Some of these seed-vessels are as gracious in line as amphorae, others are as stanchly built as the jars for the Forty Thieves. These rough-ribbed seeds mean to stick like the Pyramids, while these winged seeds are Nature's own egg-and-dart.

If the sculptor or the architect of today lacks will or magic richly to transmute these vivid forms into storied ornament, and turns still to his Chinese and Egyptians, Greeks and Florentines, what are we to think? Is it that he prefers to copy a copy of a copy rather than to create? Has he copied so much and so exactly that he has trained his outward eye at the expense of the inner eye? Is his imagination paralyzed before present-day shapes of growing things? Is it humility that inhibits him? A sculptor myself, I feel a certain shame because men of my craft seem unable, in the matter of ornament, to respond successfully to the promptings of the artistic conscience. For surely there must be such promptings; I cannot think that men of genius can be wholly content with themselves when in the use of decoration they are making no vital contribution to the history of ornament, but are merely continuing to practice "*l'art de raccomoder les restes.*"

A. A.

AN OPEN LETTER

The following letter from a worker in the far West gives a most interesting account of one of

the Federation's traveling exhibitions, and goes to show not only the interest aroused and value of the work, but the excellent cooperation to which to a great extent the success of the enterprise is due. It will, we feel, not only be of interest to members of the Federation, but to all our readers.

L. M.

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
EUGENE, ORE., May 9, 1916.

TO THE SECRETARY

THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS,
Washington, D. C.

I want to thank you most sincerely for the work the Federation is doing in the West and especially for the Exhibition of paintings in oil by American Artists which we had in Eugene last week.

The amount required to make the exhibition a success was subscribed by the people of Eugene who wanted it and wanted it a free exhibition for all. There were more than 4,000 people in attendance and the school children from the fifth to the eighth grades from the five grammar schools came in by special appointment in the mornings. The two daily newspapers were very good about publishing stories and three classes of students from the University and several classes from the public schools made the event the subject of their written exercises. This seemed to me to help create a real interest in the pictures, and among the 200 papers that I have read many of the observations were most interesting.

In the case of several hundred people this is the first lot of good paintings they have seen, and there must have been at least 2,000 people in attendance whose first good exhibition was that sent out by the Federation two years ago. Every evening of the Exhibition we had an informal lecture on the paintings, explaining how the Federation of Arts was giving advantages to those desiring them throughout the whole country. I remember one evening there were between 75 and 100 people enjoying the pictures when I had occasion to ask how many had seen the Fine Arts Exhibition in San Francisco at the Exposition. To my surprise not a single one of these wide-awake, intelligent people had had this opportunity and I thought this such a good index of the advantages you are bringing within the reach of thousands of people that I ought to tell about it.

As soon as you sent me the list of painters I began working out a bibliography of the material concerning the artists to be found in the University of Oregon and the City Public Library. Through the assistance of the University Library we compiled a bibliography, a copy of which I am sending you. It was carefully checked over and I think all the references are dependable. This gave people an opportunity to study the work of the artists before the pictures arrived. In addition to the bibliography we printed some 2,000 catalogues giving the name of the artist, his picture and the price. I do not know that the printing of the price would be approved by you but it undoubtedly attracts a number of people to the exhibitions. We all have an idea that we